

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 3110

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Children & Family Services

**Title:** An act relating to expanding parenting provisions in the WorkFirst program.

**Brief Description:** Expanding parenting provisions in the WorkFirst program.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Roberts, Darneille, Kagi, Walsh, Pettigrew, Kenney, Green, Hasegawa, Appleton and Ormsby.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Children & Family Services: 1/30/06, 2/1/06 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Revises the participation requirement under WorkFirst for a parent with a child under the age of one year.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Darneille, Dickerson, Dunn, Haler and Pettigrew.

**Minority Report:** Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Hinkle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

**Staff:** Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

**Background:**

WorkFirst is Washington's program of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Under WorkFirst, recipients of public assistance are assessed prior to referral to job search activities. Information obtained through the assessment is used to develop an individual responsibility plan that includes an employment goal; a plan for obtaining employment as quickly as possible; and a description of services available to enable the recipient to obtain and keep employment.

Unless a good cause exemption applies, recipients of public assistance must be engaged in work or work activities as a condition of continued eligibility. Good cause exemptions

include situations where necessary child care is unavailable for a child under six or for an incapacitated dependent child, and situations where a parent has a child under one year of age.

For a recipient claiming a good cause exemption due to parenting a child under one year of age, an assessment is conducted to determine specific service needs or employment barriers. Beginning when the child is three months old, the recipient is required to participate in specified activities for up to 20 hours per week. The specified activities include parenting skills instruction or training, job readiness training, high-school diploma or general educational development (GED) certificate courses, or volunteering in a licensed child-care facility.

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**Summary of Bill:**

For a recipient claiming a good cause exemption due to parenting a child under one year of age, the 20-hour per week participation requirement is replaced with a requirement that the caseworker assist the recipient with identifying and accessing appropriate instruction, training, or counseling to improve parenting skills and child well-being.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 23, 2006.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Testimony For:** Although many women return to work when their children are under one year of age, they are likely to do so with informed reasoning and are likely to have access to high quality infant child-care. Recipients of TANF usually don't have the same access to high-quality care.

Parenting should be a priority in the child's first year of life and our focus should be on doing everything we can to improve the capacity of parents to care for their infants. Most parents of young children on TANF are single mothers who do not have access to quality infant child-care. The cost of infant care can exceed \$700 per month. We know the importance of the early years of a child's life, including the importance of high-quality infant care.

There was a time when our state had more programs for parents to access child care while they attended the community colleges. Most of those programs have gone away due to funding cuts. This bill is a practical solution to the problem of the lack of access to good quality infant care for TANF mothers. Although we are working toward the goal of improving the quality of all child-care, we are not there yet.

Charity programs working with mothers have found that allowing mothers to remain at home with their infants during the first year is often critical to the success of the mother as a parent and to the well-being of the child. When we have the opportunity to work with these mothers,

we can support them in a variety of ways and we are less likely to see them later involved in the child welfare system, or in other systems because of their inability to adequately provide for their children.

Forcing mothers of young children with health complications to return to work can result in compromising the child's health and creating greater repercussions later, including hospitalization. The Children's Home Society and the Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics support this bill.

**Testimony Against:** Allowing mothers of children under one year of age to be relieved of the 20-hour participation requirement would not conflict with the federal requirements for work participation. There are about 5,400 families per month with a child under one year of age. The Governor's redesign plan does not include this component and the Department of Social and Health Services can not support this bill.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Representative Roberts, prime sponsor; Lonnie Johns-Brown, National Organization for Women; Tony Lee, Fremont Public Association; Monica Edwards, Welfare Rights Organizing Committee; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society and Washington Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics; and Donna Christensen, Washington State Catholic Conference.

(Opposed) Bev Marley, Department of Social and Health Services.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** (In support) Yolanda Adler, Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition.